

## March 2016

Greetings!

Well, I can't believe that it is almost spring! As the great Master Dogen said, "time flies like an arrow." He also said, "train like your hair is on fire." Recently in my apartment building, where seniors reside, many of my neighbors/friends have suffered serious illnesses and some have died. It has really brought home to me how fragile this life is, and how precious this meditation and training can be. It can help us to live life in peace, with an acceptance of its ebbs and flows. The training can also help when the end of life comes, not just for us, but our loved ones as well. When we live in that place of the pure love of the Eternal and experience death on that same deep level, we are truly on a magnificent path.

Now that we have finished our series on the self, there is something that I have wanted to talk about for a while. I have heard from many people over the years how difficult this meditation and training can be. I asked one of the meditation groups what came up for them when considering the difficulty of training. In response they came up with two expressions: "no pain, no gain" and "easy come, easy go." Now the first saying is pretty self-explanatory. The second often can come to mean "oh well, no big deal." However, on closer examination, I take it to mean that those things that require little effort often lead to benefits which are most fleeting. This is something that I have often reflected upon, that most things in life that are worth doing, that have depth, are very difficult.

The word difficult has a lot of negative connotations for many people, indicating something unattainable, something they have no time for. In these times especially, people want easy and fast. They want instantaneous results. This is the antithesis of the training. Zen masters have referred to the training as the "goalless goal." The training itself brings us closer to the love of the Eternal, a life of peace, a depth of understanding.

When people begin the training and meditation, or are thinking about it, the self will come up with all kinds of excuses to give it up. We all know that when the self is in charge, it leads to things that are not conducive to our wellbeing, and we move into suffering. Some of the more common excuses are "I don't have the time", "this is a waste of my time", "this is boring", "I'm not good enough, I don't have the abilities to accomplish this." When we think we don't have the time and then incorporate something worthwhile into our life, we are often surprised how easily it fits into our life.

Some of the words associated with "difficult" in the dictionary, that I found helpful are "a reluctance, an objection, an unwillingness." The self latches on to these things to discourage us from our path. It is at these times that we have to stand tall and let this reluctance, objection, and unwillingness dissipate.

At this point, I am going to bring up a word that ruffles many feathers, and that is "faith." The kind of faith I am talking about is the faith that this meditation and training works and can be really helpful, the faith in those we have known or read about for

whom it has been truly life changing. Finally, there is the faith, deep within ourselves, in the Eternal, something pure, non-judgmental, ever present, with unconditional love that is a true refuge. This last faith gains strength as we train and turns into a certainty that we live with and can always turn to.

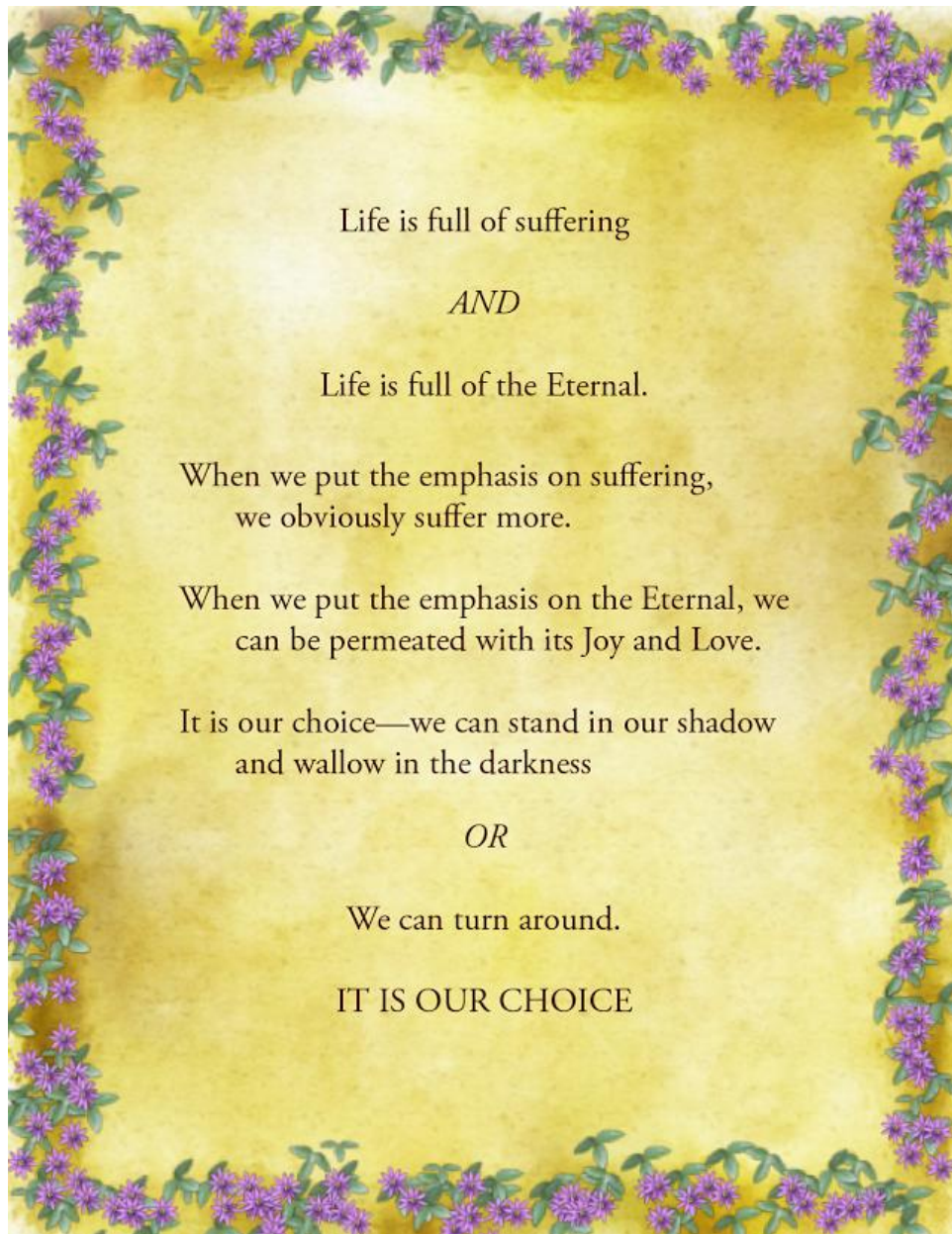
Now as we train and the self converts, and our faith and certainty strengthens, another type of difficulty occurs. As our training deepens, some deep suffering can manifest itself. This can be very painful and difficult. I have had many trainees talk to me privately about personal things coming up such as troubling life situations, childhood memories and relationships, and even very powerful emotions and thoughts that seem to come out of left field, from seemingly unknown sources, and they tell me that all these things can be overpowering and very painful. I tell them that they are doing great. They will often look at me and actually tell me that I am crazy to say that. The important thing to realize is that at this point we are getting to the root of the suffering. We know how in dental work, when we get to the root of the tooth, how sensitive and painful it is. I believe that this might be the most difficult time in the training. I, myself had an extremely rough time when fear and terror came up full blast. Often, I had no idea where it was coming from. This is where the faith I talked about earlier really came in. After a good deal of time, while I continued my training, it felt like that fear and terror found the place of love and compassion it was looking for. Now, when it comes up, it doesn't have the power that it used to have, and I can feel the love of the Eternal wash through it.

At this point I want to include a little bit from Geoff, and what came up for him when considering training with this kind of difficulty.

"Thanks Rev Master Basil. I had a couple of thoughts on this from my experience. One is just how important it has been to take refuge in the Sangha (a senior monk) at these times. To be able to take refuge in someone who is further along the path and knows what you are going through is so valuable. Without this it would be so very difficult to stay on track. And this brings me to my other thought. Staying on track is not, in my experience, a simple matter. What I've noticed is that I "wobble" - meaning, that as the powerful feelings arise it is very easy to revert to old habits that tend to cover up the pain. An example for me would be over-eating - eating until I am too full. The thoughts that promote it go along the lines, "life seems so dreary if I cannot have this extra piece of cheesecake!", or "I can't possibly make it through till morning if I don't have this extra piece of bread". However, I sense that what's really underneath these thoughts is simply the unwillingness to be with the dis-ease that is there. On the other hand, when I am willing to refrain from over-eating, and not cover up the dis-ease, it is actually quite wonderful. It may not be pleasant but there is a sense that this is what the dis-ease has needed all along - to be felt, and to be held by the deep stillness of meditation. And as this happens so my desire to over-eat lessens - it is simply out-weighed by the longing to be with the dis-ease."

Thanks Geoff.

I want to end with another time in my training, when I experienced a great deal of sadness, grief, and spiritual pain. I kept up my training and meditation, and again I could feel a kind of spiritual washing. At the end of this time, I wrote a poem. Recently, someone I trained with years ago sent me a very nice print of it and told me that it has really helped them over the years.



Take Care.  
With all my heart,

Reverend Basil